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CERAMICS

GREEK PAINTED VASES.



THE three Italo-Grecian vases illustrated herewith are from the famous Castellani collection, which, by the way, was at one time offered for sale to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The painted ornamentation is clever and well balanced, but it is for the strength and beauty of the outlines of the vessels that we particularly commend the objects as models for the student and lover of art. Dr. Dresser has well observed that whatever ornament is placed around a cup, or vase, or any tall object, should be such as will not suffer in perspective, for there is scarcely any portion of the ornament that can be seen otherwise than foreshortened. "Let simplicity," he says, "be the ruling principle in the decoration of all rounded objects, and ever remember that a line which is straight on a flat surface becomes a curve on a round surface."

It will strike the reader at once that this rule is violated in the examples set before him; but it must be remembered that the figures which constitute the decoration of these vases are treated conventionally. There is no attempt at shading. Red, black, yellow, and white were long the only colors used by the Greeks in ceramic decoration. It must not be supposed that it was through lack of knowledge that such decorations were not more pictorial; for some of the best extant are by contemporaries of Apollodorus, Zeuxis, Parrhasius, and Pausias, by whom Pliny tells us *chiaroscuro* was gradually developed by a series of steps. But, as was explained by Professor Newton in a recent lecture on Greek vases at University College, London: "The reason why this improvement in the art of painting so little affected ceramography was mainly that the convex or concave surface of the vase was better adapted to a design kept very flat than to one which by *chiaroscuro* suggested the idea of relief, and because in the great age of art the composition of the vase picture was determined in most cases by the form of the vase itself, which was regarded, like the triangular space of a pediment, as an architectural necessity." At the same time, "the absence of *chiaroscuro* led the vase painter in the best period to avoid complicated foreshortening and grouping; the face is generally seen in profile, and the figures are kept in one plane," which is not the case in these examples.

Our illustrations show three distinct vase forms: the Hydria, or water-bottle; the jar with two handles, or Amphora, and the Stamnos, or wine-jar with the lid.

PAINTING IN UNDER-GLAZE.

FOR work upon unglazed ware (*bisque*, or *biscuit*) the pigments may be used either with water and some medium to fix them, or with fat-oil and turpentine, like enamel colors. Each method has its advantages. In the first case they flow readily from the brush, and may be used like ordinary water colors. When dry upon the palette a little water soon softens them, and, if "dressed" with a suitable preparation, the surface of the *biscuit* is not unlike drawing-paper. The difficulties are: (1) The colors dry "dead"—that is, without any

disturb the first; and afterwork in enamel color upon the glaze is unnecessary, unless to repair very slight defects.

If the painting is executed entirely in color mixed with oil and turpentine the touches are more precise, a greater body of pigment is deposited, and the glossy nature of the medium gives the colors something of the hue and transparency which they will have after being fired.

It must be remembered that the depth of tints after firing depends on the quantity of the color deposited. A painting executed in colors used with water has a dead surface. The different tints appear nearly uniform in depth or force, but the pigment is much thicker upon some parts than on others. Experience is therefore necessary to decide how thickly the pigment must be applied to produce colors varying in strength.

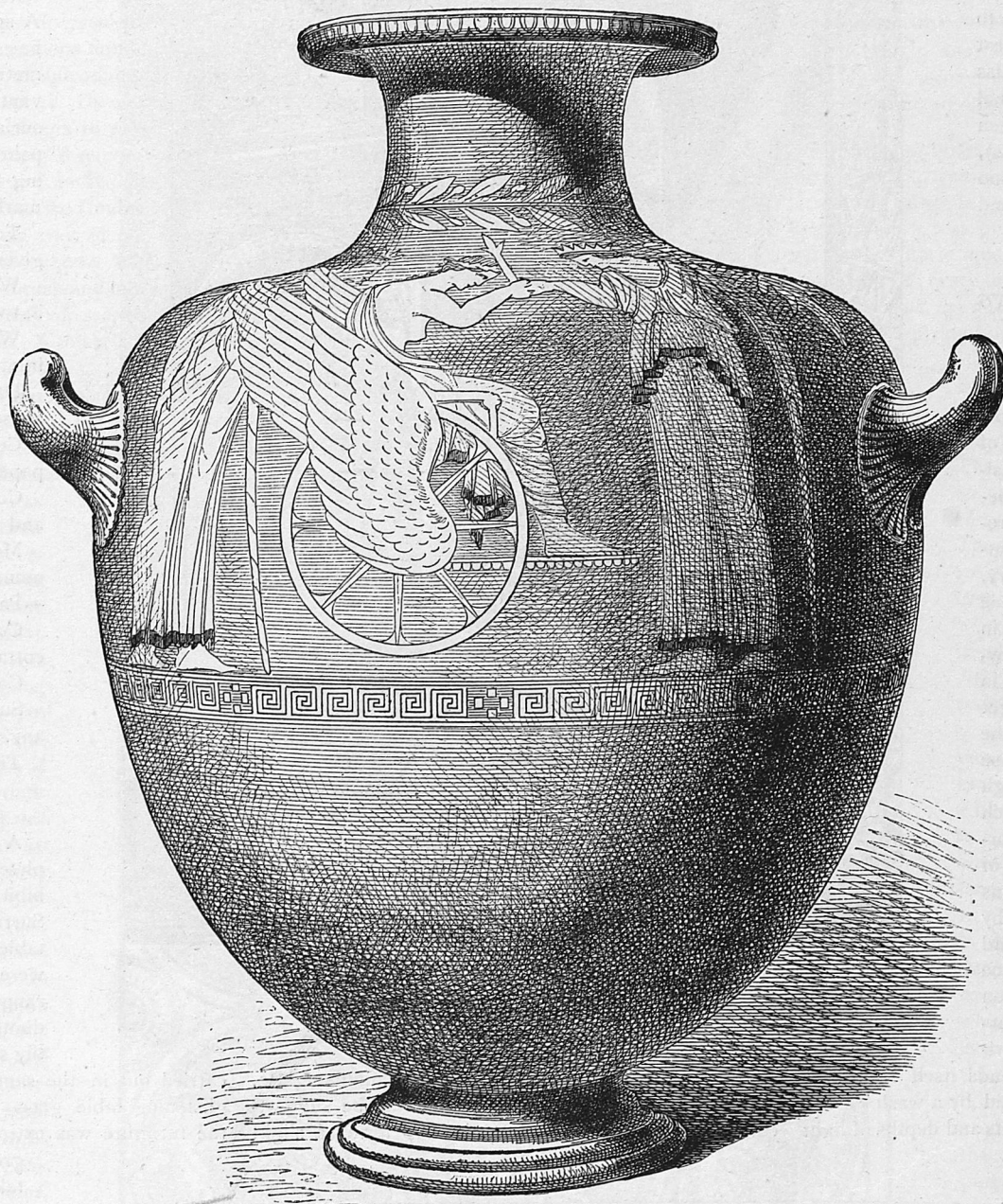
Pink and dark blue excepted, all other colors should, as a rule, be applied so thickly as to conceal the surface of the ware, and present, when dry, the appearance of a painting in tempera, as seen in good specimens of the art of illuminating. Pink applied thus thickly will become, when fired, a fine crimson. For pink tints, and especially in flesh painting, it can scarcely be used too delicately. The thinnest possible layer of color will suffice.

Under-glaze colors may be mixed at pleasure to produce any variety of compound tints. For general directions as to their use it will be sufficient to explain the method of executing a painting in one color on the *biscuit*; and, for decorative work on a white surface, none can be selected so suitable as the dark blue known also as "flowing blue."

A practised draughtsman frequently sketches his subject directly on the *biscuit*, using either charcoal or common water colors. Those who have less experience will find it preferable to make a design on paper and draw the outlines firmly and clearly. An exact tracing from these can be transferred to the *biscuit* with ordinary red or blue transfer paper. Very light pressure with the tracing point will convey a sufficiently clear impression; and it is generally advisable to remove some of the coloring matter from

the transfer paper by laying it face downward on a sheet of rather rough paper and rubbing the back with some smooth implement, such as an ivory knife-handle. Slight corrections may be made in the transferred design with a very hard lead pencil, and rubbing out or cleaning effected with stale bread. Some of the powder colors must be rubbed down with gum and water, or water-color megilp, using enough water to make it flow easily from the pen or brush.

The outlines may be drawn with a medium-pointed bone or gilt pen, or with a small brush. If a pen is



GREEK VASE. HYDRIA, OR WATER-JAR.

IN THE CASTELLANI COLLECTION.

gloss, and, consequently, are quite unlike what they become after glazing and firing. (2) They are apt to run, and, when floated on, settle unequally. A mottled appearance results, more color having been deposited on one part than another. (3) It is not easy to lay on a sufficient body of color to produce tints of full depth, with allowance for waste produced by the action of the fire. With practice, however, all these obstacles are overcome, and complete work may be executed with one firing only. Some painters begin with water color and finish with oil. The second painting will not

used it must be filled with color from a brush and the color stirred frequently. The blue is a powerful color, and it is impossible to wash out any mark made with it so that no stain shall ultimately appear. The thinnest wash will give a tint when the glazing and firing are completed, and such a thickness of pigment as quite conceals the surface will give a deep blue. Beginners generally apply it too thickly, and it afterward appears almost black, or shows a sort of filmy iridescence, technically termed "ironing," or becoming "ironed."

For painting, the brush must be fully charged, and the colors, if possible, should be run or floated on, or laid with broad rapid touches. It is desirable to paint light parts with one wash of thin color, and dark parts with one wash of thick color, instead of trying to gain depth by several washes one over the other. Still, colors may be added by small broad touches lightly applied, and the glaze will cause them to flow partially together. A certain amount of irregularity in the depth of the tints and a blotty look are not objectionable, and are always preferable to a dotted, feeble effect, produced by hatching or stippling. Some skill is required to wash on a ground tint of dark blue over a space of any considerable extent. It may be "bossed" or dabbed on with brushes sold for the purpose. This is best done if the color is mixed with fat-oil and turpentine; it will not sink or dry so quickly, and can be more easily and deliberately worked.

If the design includes small forms in white on a blue ground, they can be added in white enamel when the piece has been glazed and fired. It is very difficult to leave them untouched when rapidly laying on color.

Designs combining the under-glaze blue and over-glaze or enamel red are effective. The parts to be colored red must be left quite white, and the red afterward applied on the glaze and fixed by the enamelling kiln.

Under-glaze paintings, before they are glazed, undergo a process termed "hardening on." They are subjected to moderate heat, which expels all the oil and turpentine and attaches the color to the ware. This is necessary, because the oil would repel the glaze which is mixed with water.

It is important to observe that if under-glaze colors are used with oil and turpentine it is not of much consequence how much turpentine is added, so long as the colors can be effectively worked. If, however, too much fat-oil is used, and the color when dry looks very glossy, thickly applied color will almost certainly be spoiled by the boiling of the oil in the hardening kiln. It will have a blistered, lumpy look, and can scarcely be repaired, the only remedy being to chip it off, and, having rubbed down remaining roughnesses with pumice-stone, touch on some enamel color and fire the painting again.

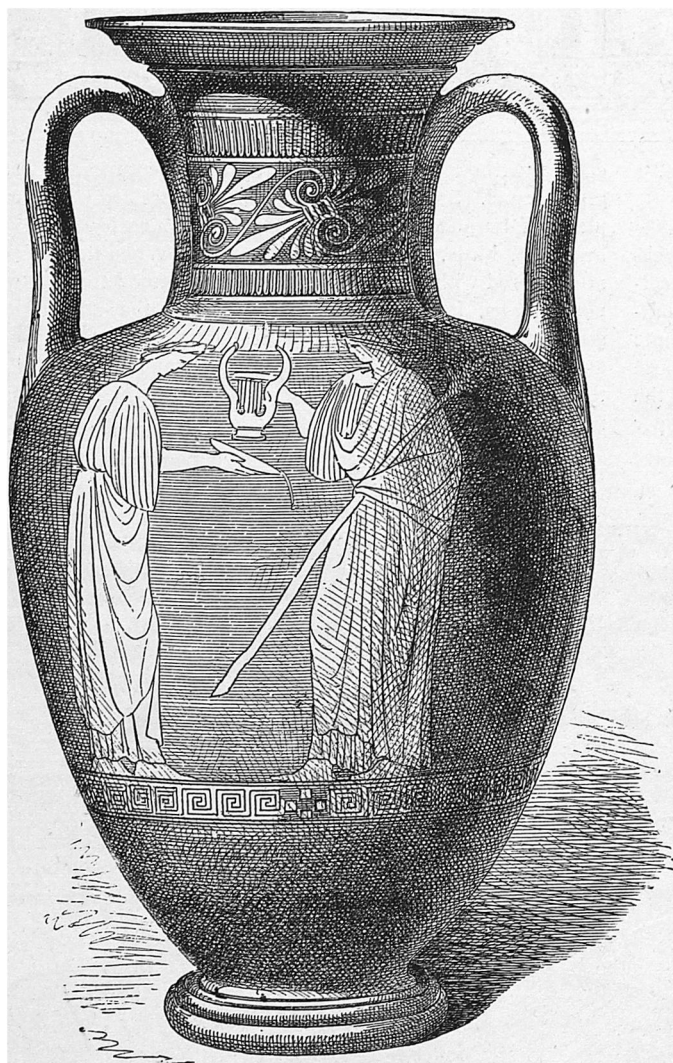
Thin color is most easily laid on the biscuit if mixed with a good deal of fat-oil, as it will not sink so quickly into the porous surface, and effects of the fire need not be feared. To regulate the quality of the mixed color for different portions of the work, the brush is dipped in the fat-oil or turpentine contained in the slants of the palette.

CHINESE AND JAPANESE DECORATION.

THE Chinese and Japanese decorators, revelling in the delights of bright, yet tender, color, press earth and air, fire and water, into their service. Nothing is too high or too humble for them; from sea and sky, mountain and forest, they turn with

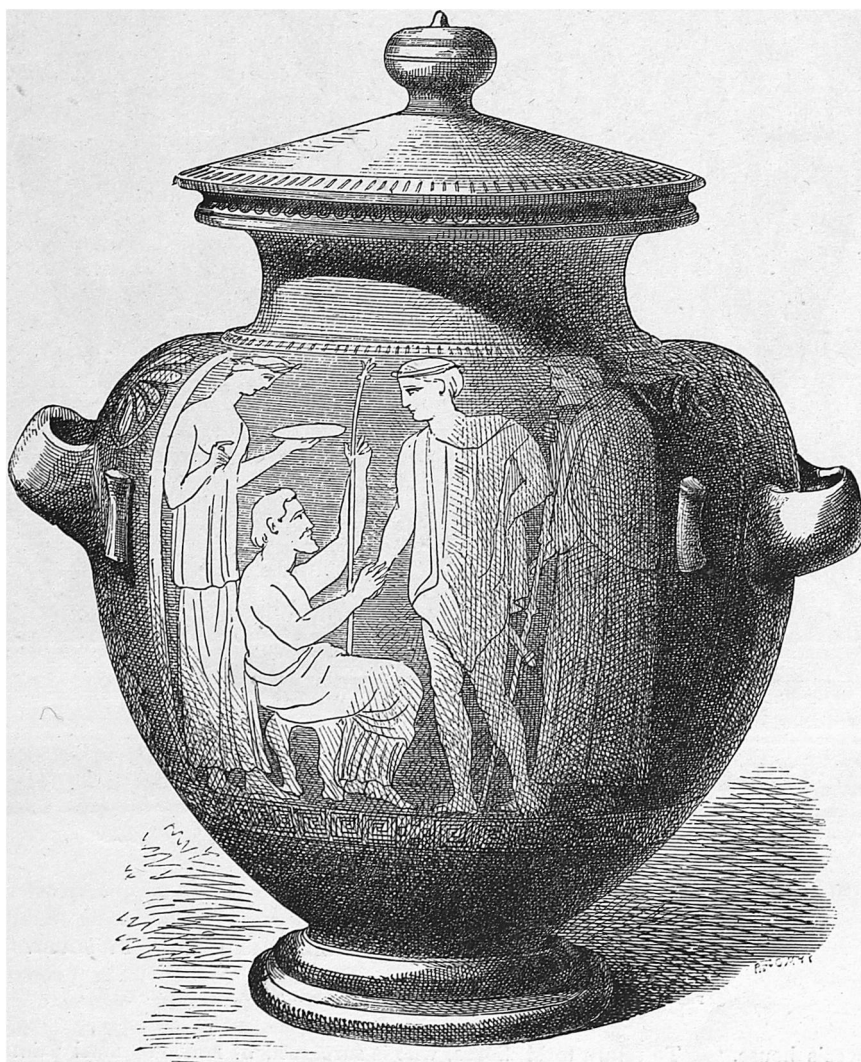
equal affection to wild creatures, furred or feathered, to plants and flowers, and the tiny insects to which they

and form are too grotesque and distinctly national to be instructive examples for Europeans, though introduced with extreme skill, and showing in the draperies finely varied patterns and beautiful harmonies of color. These remarks apply only to fine examples of early Chinese art, for the artistic spirit departed long since from the nation—perhaps banished by the same destructive influence of European commerce which is already contributing to the evident and rapid deterioration of Japanese art-work. It is a strange and disastrous consequence of intercourse between the Eastern and Western nations, observable in all cases, that the former quickly substitute for artistic enthusiasm the trader's love of gain, and the glory of their national art departs. It is, therefore, only to the best decorated work of China and Japan, produced when extensive commerce with other nations was not thought of, and the genuine art instincts of each race had full play, that attention can safely be given by those who would learn how to unite decorative treatment with fidelity to nature. What is wanted is not a labored imitation, but the expression in its simplest form of the essential characteristics of each object represented. The construction, grace, and color of plants and flowers; the strength or lissomeness of trees; the forms, in action or repose, of beasts, birds, and fishes; the set and texture of fur, feathers, and scales; the play of limbs, wings, and fins—in a word, all distinctive properties are shown by the Japanese artists by a few spirited strokes, of which not one is without purpose. A volume would not suffice to illustrate the high art qualities of their commonest productions; and the study and application of their principles may be confidently recommended to those who cannot accept realistic art as decorative.



GREEK VASE. AMPHORA.
IN THE CASTELLANI COLLECTION.

afford food and shelter. The occupations of civil and military life, and even the dwellings of different ranks,



GREEK VASE. STAMNOS, OR WINE-JAR.
IN THE CASTELLANI COLLECTION.

It is necessary, to paint comfortably, that the beginner should have a table devoted to the purpose, as much as possible. It should hold all the implements necessary for this kind of work. This table may be made of pine just as well as of a more expensive wood; it can be a studio table or a drawing-room table. It is easy to transform any table whatsoever into a pottery painter's bench; it suffices but to add a long and narrow board, with or without a leg, called a "rest." Fixed outside the table, at a right angle, "the rest" furnishes a support for the artist's right arm. For painting on tiles, as well as on hollow articles, it is important that the hand should rest on a flat or a round ruler, in order to allow the brush only to touch the china, and never the hand or the fingers, which would rub off and spoil all the work you had taken much trouble, and in many cases much time, to do. Once these arrangements made, you place on the easel the original to be copied, and nearer to you the object to be decorated. On your right is the glass slab; upon the slab are the three small vials containing spirits of turpentine, spirits of lavender, and oil of turpentine. To the right of the slab a small oblong cardboard box, containing lead pencils, lithographic crayons, penknife, scraper, red sable and camel-hair brushes, and pitch brushes (dabbers). On the other side of the object you are painting, the color-box containing the tubes. At a good distance away from the painting, a vial with a small quantity of spirits of wine. A small rag should be retained by the slab before you.

The beginner should never lose an opportunity to see some practical china painter at work, and notice carefully his tools and materials.